

Documenting Podemos and the rise of DIY politics in Fernando León de Aranoa's *Política, manual de instrucciones* (2016)

Abstract: Centring on Fernando León de Aranoa's *Política, manual de instrucciones*, this essay examines what Antonio Gramsci has called the 'crisis of authority' in the context of (post-) crisis Spain. I claim that León de Aranoa's documentary feature not only registers the emergence of Podemos as a nascent political party, it also attempts to legitimize Podemos as the only viable parliamentary alternative to the hegemony of the Partido Popular (PP) and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE).

Resumen: Centrándose en *Política, manual de instrucciones* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 2016), este ensayo examina lo que Antonio Gramsci ha llamado la 'crisis de autoridad' dentro del contexto de la (post-) crisis en España. Sostengo que el documental de León de Aranoa no sólo registra la emergencia de Podemos como nascente partido político, sino que también intenta legitimar a Podemos como la única alternativa parlamentaria a la hegemonía del Partido Popular (PP) y el Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE).

Keywords: Fernando León de Aranoa; *Política, manual de instrucciones*; Podemos; Antonio Gramsci; documentary cinema

Palabras clave: Fernando León de Aranoa; *Política, manual de instrucciones*; Podemos; Antonio Gramsci; cine documental

Known for their earnest if somewhat morose tenor, the films of Fernando León de Aranoa have been met with ambivalence since the release of *Familia* in 1996. Accused by some of an excessively timid realism that fails to articulate a concrete political programme (Quintana 2008, 251-252), the director has at times been panned for crafting imaginaries freighted with contrived representations of suffering and poverty. Detractors argue that León de Aranoa's films resort to affective manipulation, relying on emotive soundtracks, character identification, and carefully plotted narratives to achieve little more than 'maudlin melodrama' (Lee 2006). Others, however, have praised his efforts to document the after-effects of the neoliberal turn in Spain over the last 20 years.¹ These critics claim that León de Aranoa—the winner of six Goya awards—has cultivated a highly lyrical strain of social realism that confronts the mass precarity induced by the expansion of global capitalism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Torreiro 2017, 16-17). More

balanced readings, however, acknowledge the ‘middlebrow’ tendencies of his films,² which explore social issues through accessible and entertaining storylines (Faulkner 2013, 243), thereby obscuring the frontier between social realism and melodrama (Whittaker 2011, 141). Regardless of their (dis)taste for his work, scholars working on León de Aranoa have returned, time and time again, to questions of genre, often obscuring the objects of critique studied within his films. The imposition of generic categories such as *realismo tímido*, middlebrow cinema, *cine social* or *cine comprometido*,³ and *realismo melodramático*,⁴ has—to some extent—dictated critical reception of León de Aranoa and an entire generation of Spanish filmmakers that emerged in the mid-1990s.⁵

Centring on León de Aranoa’s 2016 documentary *Política, manual de instrucciones*, this essay attempts to shift the focus from genre to politics and, in the process, situate the film amongst a number of other documentaries produced in Spain since the financial crisis of 2008. Reading *Política* as a symptom of an era in which ‘the old is dying and the new cannot be born’ (Gramsci 1971, 556), I argue that León de Aranoa’s film should be interpreted as an ambivalent statement on Spain’s political present and, crucially, as an attempt to shape its future. Implicitly diagnosing the ‘crisis of authority’ facing the political class in Spain since the outbreak of the 15-M Movement in 2011 (Gramsci 1971, 556), *Política* tracks the rise of Podemos in the months leading up to the general election of 2015 (20 December). León de Aranoa’s film imagines Podemos as the only viable alternative to the parliamentary control exerted by the Partido Popular (PP) and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) since October of 1982. *Política*—in the director’s words—celebrates ‘la irrupción de una formación política nueva, que, sin presencia parlamentaria, le disputa el poder a los grandes partidos tradicionales’ (as quoted in Belinchón 2015). Nevertheless, while

the documentary explores an interval of some 14 months—from the Vistalegre Assembly (18 October 2014) to the general election of December 2015—León de Aranoa admits that he has his sights set on the future.⁶ Hoping to record ‘la gestación de un proceso de gran intensidad política’ for posterity (as quoted in Belinchón 2015), he claims that his intentions were to create a film capable of explaining ‘lo que pasó este año y el año pasado en España’ to future generations of Spanish spectators (as quoted in Abelleira 2016).

Questions of time and temporality, as a number of scholars have noted elsewhere, are essential to our understanding of *la crisis* as a ‘meta-historical concept like *the transition*, *the war*, *the eighties*, or *the building boom*’ (Labrador Méndez 2014, 268).⁷ Much more than a contextual descriptor, however, the term *crisis* has operated as a framework for grappling with the stark realities of an era in which a variety of material privations have been inflicted on the middle and lower classes. State-imposed violence (austerity measures, housing evictions, the suppression of free speech and public assembly, increased privatization, escalating rates of poverty and unemployment), in many instances, has led to abject poverty, homelessness, anxiety, depression, and—in the most extreme of cases—suicide.⁸ Imagined as an impasse, which stemmed from decades of neoliberal policy and the financial crash of 2008, the crisis became comprehensible as a ‘social catastrophe’ or a period of time in which ‘one no longer [knew] what to do or how to live and yet, while unknowing, [was forced to] adjust’ (Berlant 2011, 200). While a great number of Spaniards felt immobilized by the crisis, the explosion of populist mobilizations during and after the 15M gave rise to an embryonic political project that began to underscore the emergent ‘rift between popular masses and ruling ideologies’ (Gramsci 1971, 556). As Juan Carlos Monedero argues in León de Aranoa’s *Política*, the 15M ‘desbarató el relato’

of legitimate democratic rule in crisis-ridden Spain. Turning from *la crisis* to what Gramsci has called a ‘crisis of authority’ (1971, 556), the ‘Podemos revolution’ (Tremlett 2015), therefore, has arisen as a direct result of the ruling class’ inability to govern *consensually*.

As Gramsci writes, what materializes in times of crisis are interregna, or extraordinary periods in which the very bodies meant to sustain the socio-political-legal order (monarchies, parliaments, police, courts, etc.) lose their legitimacy. The crisis—as a turning point—evinces a historical interval in which the political elite relies on ‘coercive force’ to maintain its dominance (Gramsci 1971, 556). As the hegemony orchestrated by the PP/PSOE has begun to crumble over the last 10 years, state-inflicted force has been deployed to safeguard its stability. Since March of 2015, the Ley Mordaza, or the ‘Ley Orgánica de protección de la seguridad ciudadana’, has enforced severe restrictions on public assembly and free speech, levying fines for challenging police authority (up to €600), disseminating images of the Guardia Civil without written permission (up to €30,000), and coordinating unsanctioned protests in or near transportation zones (up to €600,000). Additionally, the Partido Popular’s re-working of Article 573 of the Código Penal (March 2015) has allowed the Spanish State unprecedented access to private internet histories under the rubric of anti-terrorist protection.⁹ More recently, the use of physical force during the Catalan Referendum (1 October 2017) and the enactment of Article 155 (27 October 2017) to seize control of Catalonia’s civil service, local police, finances, and public media reflect the central government’s failure to rule without force. King Felipe’s scathing response to Catalanian secession and his 2016 Christmas speech, in which he shamed Spaniards participating in public demonstrations, further exhibit the *dirigiste* tendencies of the political class.¹⁰

Nevertheless, given the fact that the interregna described by Gramsci are generally characterized by public disengagement, ‘the possibility and necessity of creating a new culture’ remains a central concern (1971 557). Indeed, the (in)ability to cultivate a distinct ‘arrangement’ of political organization in (post-) crisis Spain has become the ‘problem of the younger generation’ (1971 556). And while Gramsci’s analysis is inflected by Leninist echoes of a ‘revolutionary situation’, the anticipated collapse of ‘the extant legal frame of social order’ in Spain has only complicated the construction of a replacement frame (Bauman 2012, 29). The establishment of a new political frame, which may still be ‘at the designing stage, has not yet been fully assembled, or is not strong enough to be put in its place’ (Bauman 2012, 29), has undoubtedly proven difficult to manufacture despite Podemos’s gains in the European and Spanish Parliaments over the last three years. Moreover, the withering of the political sphere in Spain—and elsewhere—has destabilized the notion of *any* legal frame as a feasible supporting structure for governmental institutions. The attempt to fashion a workable frame capable of supplanting the old one, as Gramsci underscores, precipitates ‘a great variety of morbid symptoms’ in societies riven by a ‘crisis of authority’ (1971 556).

In the case of an artist such as Fernando León de Aranoa, one can easily identify the ideological project undergirding a body of work produced since the mid-1990s. Underscoring the ‘unanchored and free-floating’ nature of sovereignty in a politically enervated landscape, the director’s films contest the purportedly ‘unbreakable marriage of power and politics’ in contemporary Spain (Bauman 2012, 50). Accordingly, nearly all of León de Aranoa’s films adduce templates for challenging the policies of the PP/PSOE—and their hegemonic status—over the last 20 years. Early works such as *Barrio* (1998) and *Los lunes al sol* (2002) address

urban blight in the outskirts of Madrid and industrial restructuring and unemployment in northern Spain. *Princesas* (2005) and *Amador* (2010) tackle prostitution, sexual violence, immigration, and eldercare, death, and precarious employment in the Spanish capital, respectively. More recent narrative films like *A Perfect Day* (2015) and *Loving Pablo* (2017) centre on global issues such as the struggle of aid workers in an unspecified Balkan country in 1995 and Pablo Escobar's reign of terror in Colombia in the 1980s and early 1990s. León de Aranoa's documentary work conveys a similar sense of engagement with socio-political issues both at home and abroad. In films like *Primarias* (1998), *Caminantes* (2001), 'Buenas noches, Ouma' (2007), and *Refugiados* (2013), he examines electoral politics in Spain, the oppression of indigenous communities in rural Mexico, the havoc wreaked by the Lord's Resistance Army's in northern Uganda, and the experiences of Sudanese and Somali refugees living in makeshift encampments in Ethiopia.

Nearly 20 years after the premiere of *Primarias*, *Política, manual de instrucciones* marks León de Aranoa's return to documenting parliamentary politics in Spain. First broadcast on Canal+, *Primarias* follows the 1998 run-off between Joaquín Almunia and Josep Borrell for Secretary General of the PSOE. León de Aranoa co-directed the TV feature with Azucena Rodríguez and Gracia Querejeta, filming Borrell on the campaign trail while Rodríguez shot with Almunia.¹¹ *Primarias* established an important precedent for the director, as he and his colleagues opened up a dialogue on the ideological underpinnings of the PSOE 'en una democracia tan poca acostumbrada a la transparencia' (Torreiro 2017, 182). First airing on election night (24 April 1998), *Primarias* helped endear Borrell—the former Minister of Public Works, Transportation, and the Environment (1991-1996)—to a wider audience. Nevertheless, his shock victory, as a relative outsider, in the primary

surprised everyone including León de Aranoa. More importantly, the film chronicles a decisive moment in leftist politics in Spain following nearly 14 years of Felipe González's leadership. The confrontation between Borrell and Almunia, which some viewed as damaging to the PSOE's electoral prospects in the general election,¹² helped shatter 'the closed and hierarchical character of party decisions that had characterized the party during the previous decade' (Méndez-Lago 2005, 187). Further, the run-off was an opportunity for members of the PSOE to stage an internal debate regarding their own party's programme and break away, if only momentarily, from 'the theology of centrism' that has come to define the neoliberal era (Wood 2017).¹³

Política, much like *Primarias*, pits the so-called establishment (the PP/PSOE dyad) against an insurgent outsider (Podemos). León de Aranoa's decision to follow Podemos in the 14 months preceding the 2015 general election was likely inspired by the extra-filmic arc of *Primarias*, especially given Borrell's triumph in the spring of 1998. Hoping to strike lightning once again, the director acknowledged that—for him—'la gestación de Podemos ha sido como un thriller' (as quoted in Carrera 2016), which he hoped to capture on film. As a historical document, therefore, *Política* sets out to map Podemos's presumptive rise from a fledgling activist group to a legitimate parliamentary party within a post-15M context. For León de Aranoa, the process of recording the ups-and-downs of a party inventing itself before the audience's eyes 'le añade más interés, más tensión al relato' being developed in the feature-length documentary (as quoted in Belinchón 2015). The deployment of terms such as thriller and tension, I would argue, reflects the overtly ideological aims of a documentarian bent on narrativizing Podemos's upward trajectory and corroborating its status as a viable parliamentary alternative. Further, as León de Aranoa aims to address 'the

viewer as citizen, as a member of the social collective, as putative participant in the public sphere' (Chanan 2007, 16), he tries to ramp up the drama and, consequently, works to elicit the sympathy of audiences by humanizing party leadership. While *Política*'s final chapter is somewhat marred by Podemos's 'electoral under-achievement' in the general election of 2015 (Wheeler 2017, 447), the film's status as an index, or what León de Aranoa calls a record ('registro'), to some degree transcends Podemos's performance (as quoted in Belinchón 2015). Further, the decision to trace the party's imagined ascent in a post-15M landscape exhibits León de Aranoa's conviction regarding the need for debate, dialogue, and transparency in times of uncertainty: 'El objetivo [en el documental es] estar dentro en los momentos buenos y en los malos—cuando hay una crisis y se cierran las puertas de los despachos para tomar las decisiones complicadas (as quoted in Torreiro 2016, 181).

Like a number of documentary films released over the last 10 years,¹⁴ *Política* can be understood as a historical record, as a piece of propaganda, as an ethical intervention in a time of political and economic uncertainty, as an attempt to stimulate dialogue amongst an already engaged audience, and, most obviously, as an instruction manual—or a user's guide—for understanding and participating in contemporary Spanish politics. What we find, however, upon closer analysis is that León de Aranoa's film evinces all of these phenomena at the same time. Much like Pere Portabella's landmark documentary *Informe general sobre algunas cuestiones de interés para una proyección pública* (1976)—released during the Transition to democracy—and its recent sequel *Informe general II: el nuevo rapto de Europa* (2015), *Política* is 'caught midway between representing and transforming the world' (Nadal-Melsió 2017, 333). Nevertheless, unlike Portabella's more reflexive documentary work, León de Aranoa's *Política* fails to examine what Íñigo Errejón

has described as the ‘colapso de las narrativas, de las instituciones, de las élites que hasta ahora repartían las posiciones y ordenaban las lealtades’ in (post-) crisis Spain (Errejón and Mouffe 2015, 90). Instead, *Política* focuses on the rise of Podemos and not on the re-articulation of national ‘referentes, hitos, nombres y símbolos nuevos o resignificados’ that may ultimately serve as the catalyst for a new political order in Spain (Errejón and Mouffe 2015, 90). As a result, while setting the stage for a landmark win by Podemos in the general election of 2015—which never materializes—León de Aranoa places the highest of expectations on the nascent party as the only parliamentary option capable of vanquishing the PP/PSOE deadlock.

Some of *Política*’s earliest sequences feature interview footage devoted to narrating Podemos’s historic emergence in the aftermath of the 15-M Movement. While Errejón admits that, initially, the idea for the party was little more than ‘una intuición’, it quickly spiralled into ‘una convicción’. Given the fact that the vast majority of Spaniards had been negatively affected by the crisis, he states that the possibility of ‘una mayoría política nueva en España’ no longer seemed like such a distant prospect. Errejón’s insistence on terms such as ‘transversal’, ‘ruptura’, and ‘cambio’ in his interviews—in which he often exceeds the frame (Figure 4)—speaks to Podemos’s broader agenda: to generate ‘una nueva hegemonía’ in Spanish parliament (Errejón and Mouffe, 2015 90). Pablo Iglesias, elucidating the unique circumstances in which Podemos first came into being, explains that ‘Es como si hubiera un muro que va pasando delante de ti, y de repente hay una ventana que pasa y pasa durante un ratito, y tú tienes además como la oportunidad de saltar que es como o probamos ahora o esto se nos va a ir’. More than a year after the formation of Podemos (16 January 2014), however, both Errejón and Iglesias confess that the journey has been an arduous one. Iglesias, speaking to a small group of party

members in *Política* (Figure 5), admits that the constant attacks from PP/PSOE surrogates have taken their toll. Attempting to rouse his team, Iglesias insists that ‘el mayor desafío es llegar vivos a las elecciones generales’ of 2015.

Undoubtedly shaped by the ‘incisión performativa’ produced by the 15-M Movement, León de Aranoa’s documentary underscores ‘un corte en la relación entre pasado y presente’ that has come to define the socio-cultural landscape in Spain since 2011 (Marsh 2015).¹⁵ This aperture—effectively the chasm that stands between an uncertain future and the neoliberal hegemony of the last 40 years—can be viewed, as an opportunity to ‘abrir otro ciclo político’ (Errejón and Mouffe 2015 22). Within the context of *Política*, in interview footage Errejón argues fervently for the need to launch ‘un asalto acelerado al poder político’. Oddly enough, however, despite its introductory intertitles, *Política* de-emphasizes the potential linked to public assembly and street protests in contemporary Spain. Instead, the film imagines ways in which those energies can be manifested through the world of institutional politics. Targeting the hegemonic political class—and its financial backers—as the adversaries of the Spanish people, Errejón contends that the establishment is fully prepared to ‘asediar, acosar y hostigar la posibilidad de una alternativa política’. We are left to assume, then, that while León de Aranoa’s film sets out to ‘mobilize the viewer as a social subject, situated in history’ (Chanan 2007, 16), the only apparent option is to support the extant legal frame of Spanish parliament and vote for Podemos in future election cycles. And while the director claims that ‘parece que en el documental no hay mediación de la cámara’ (as quoted in Reguera 2016), astute viewers will be able to recognize the film as ‘un documental puesto al servicio de Podemos’ (del Álamo 2016).

From the very outset, *Política* establishes a clear temporal frame in order to contest the political situation in Spain from 2014 onward, a period in which, as the intertitles indicate, 'La crisis económica deja un paisaje de recortes sociales, desahucios, desempleo'. A rapid-fire succession of still photographs flashes before our eyes, underscoring the hardships facing Spaniards in an era defined by austerity measures, precarious employment, and the housing crisis. The deployment of still images in the documentary's opening frames is significant, as it recalls Susan Sontag's claims that photographs 'may be more memorable than moving images, because they are a neat slice of time, not a flow' (1977 17). Accompanied by a series of jarring percussive beats, these photos effectively suspend the flow of time, if only for a matter of moments, and force the spectator to confront the anguish of the victims captured in each of the 15 images. Nevertheless, León de Aranoa barrels through these stills at full tilt, clearly anxious to move the action along. Subsequently he provides a number of scripted intertitles, which justify the need for public protest, populist mobilization, and a re-consideration of democracy in (post-) crisis Spain. These intertitles, used sparingly throughout the remainder of the film, tell viewers that it was the Spanish government that invited 'a los que protestan a canalizar sus demandas por la vía parlamentaria'. Laying the groundwork for the emergence and continued relevance of Podemos—intra-filmically and extra-filmically—León de Aranoa plots a carefully constructed narrative arc that works to shape viewers' alliances from the very beginning.

The significance of *Política*'s introduction cannot be underplayed given the director's overt efforts to (re-)frame the audience's impressions of the contemporary political landscape in Spain. As paratextual devices that border what appears to be an observational documentary about Podemos,¹⁶ the still photographs and intertitles

constitute thinly veiled ideological accessories despite taking up a mere 40 seconds of screen time. Nevertheless, as Gérard Genette has argued, the presence of these framing devices can elude even the most attentive of audiences who may not be prepared to ‘disregard them as easily as they would like and as they claim to do’ (1997 3). Everything that appears in the immediate aftermath of the opening sequence, therefore, must be scrutinized despite León de Aranoa’s claims that ‘la intención del documental no fue hacer un video promocional’ for Podemos ahead of the 2015 general election (as quoted in Carrera 2016). Even as the director maintains that *Política* ‘está hecho con honestidad’ (as quoted in Abelleira 2016), he acknowledges that the film was made with funds from Jaume Roures, the founder of Mediapro, who launched the left-leaning daily paper *Público* in 2007 and helped finance films directed by Oliver Stone (*Comandante*, 2003) and Woody Allen (*Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, 2008 and *Midnight in Paris*, 2011). The 114 minutes that follow—extracted from more than 500 hours of campaign trail footage—largely adhere to the tenets of observational documentary, as León de Aranoa offers what he describes as unmitigated behind-the-scenes access to Podemos’s party leadership. In the process, in the director’s words, *Política* exposes ‘los debates internos de ideas’ regarding everything from fiscal policy to electoral strategy (as quoted in Marcos 2016), debate preparation, Catalan independence, responses to attacks from rivals from the PP, the PSOE, and Ciudadanos, and how much the burgeoning party should embrace alliances in Latin America (Evo Morales in Bolivia and José Mujica in Uruguay) and Greece (Alexis Tsipras).

Nevertheless, in spite of countless statements that ‘lo que aparece en la pantalla no tiene nada que ver con un trabajo de lo que se podría entender como de campaña’ (as quoted in Marcos 2016), León de Aranoa’s film expresses its

ideological aims from its opening frames. Inspired by documentaries such as *Primary* (Robert Drew, 1960), *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (Drew, 1963), *La batalla de Chile* (Patricio Guzmán, 1975-1979), and *By the People: The Election of Barack Obama* (Amy Rice and Alicia Sams, 2009), *Política* imagines Podemos as the only parliamentary alternative to ‘una dictadura partidocrática encabezada por las inamovibles siglas del PPSOE’ (‘Manifiesto Democracia Real Ya’ 2011). Nonetheless, none of the party leaders featured in the documentary offer any details regarding Podemos’s ideological agenda. There are a number of discussions and interviews that revolve around strategy (debates, alliances, electoral maps, polling data), but very few references to what *ideas* are meant to galvanize voters across Spain. ‘Tratamos de elegir un escenario en el que podemos ganar’, says Iglesias in one of the film’s most revealing moments. ‘Si hablamos de desahucios, ganamos’, he continues, instructing party members to avoid more polemical topics such as the monarchy, animal rights, or Catalanian independence. Tellingly, in a review published by *El País* only three weeks before the 2016 general election, Francesco Manetto and Elsa García de Blas dismissed the party’s ideological posturing—and León de Aranoa’s documentary—by claiming that ‘Podemos confirma en un documental que prioriza la estrategia’ (Manetto and García de Blas 2016). Nevertheless, in promotional interviews the director has stated that *Política* does indeed showcase Podemos’s agenda, claiming that ‘ahí [en el documental] está su programa, es su misión. Nuestra misión era plasma cómo lo elaboran, como lo trabajan, cómo lo discuten internamente. Lo otro sería otra película’ (as quoted in Reguera 2016).

Whether we read *Política* as a piece of filmic propaganda,¹⁷ as an artistic experiment,¹⁸ as a historical text,¹⁹ or as an instruction manual for a future politics,

there is little doubt that León de Aranoa's documentary contests the radical uncertainty permeating the social order in (post-) crisis Spain. Engaging a concrete historical reality in (post-) crisis Spain that is represented as 'a thick moment of ongoingness' (Berlant 2011, 200), the film wades through the swamp of parliamentary politics carrying Podemos on its shoulders. In the process, León de Aranoa exposes the depths of his own ideological convictions, perhaps too overtly, while promoting the advancement of a fledgling party that appears more concerned with victory than policy reform. Despite his best attempts to render Podemos's leaders as likeable, creative, intelligent, and honest, the director never fully manages to expose 'lo que se esconde entre el rostro y su máscara' (Martínez 2016). As a result, what emerges is an oddly enervated portrait of a party in its infancy. Leaders such as Errejón and Iglesias contend with their own exhaustion on the campaign trail, face accusations of corruption and incompetence, and confront bald-faced lies about their purported alliances with Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) and assorted Latin American government officials. Viewers are exposed to very little of the creativity and media savvy implemented by Podemos since its founding in early 2014. One could argue that the 2016 release of Podemos's party manifesto—in the form of a 196-page IKEA catalogue—offered more details regarding 'herramientas nuevas' for re-shaping Spain's political future than the whole of León de Aranoa's documentary feature (Bescansa, et al., 2016 1).²⁰

In the end, perhaps the best way to read *Política, manual de instrucciones* is as a symptom of an era defined by a 'crisis of authority' (Gramsci 1971, 556). Locating Spain on the precipice of a new political order that has not yet been fully imagined, *Política* aims to move beyond the nation's democratic impasse and push through the amorphousness of a time marked by dissolution and dislocation. Surveying new and

potentially powerful sites of solidarity through affect—or sympathy with Podemos leadership—León de Aranoa only manages to refer elliptically to the crises afflicting the social order in Spain (from national and regional institutions to economies both domestic and European). Nevertheless, *Política* does allude to the promise—if rather distant—of a new way of doing politics. Working to extract the support of his viewers, his film recalls Stuart Hall’s writings on the *possibility* of a political and economic order strong enough to displace the cruelties imposed by neoliberalism in Western democracies across the globe. The mere promise of a new system, however, as Hall claimed, requires work, maintenance, renewal, revision, and a collective approach. Consequently, the intervallic appearance of ‘counter-movements, resistance, alternative strategies, and visions’ throughout history should serve notice that ‘history is never closed, but maintains an open horizon toward the future’ (2011 727-728).

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(Figure 1: Members of Podemos draft the stage design for the 2014 Vistalegre Assembly.)



(Figure 2: Highly charged signifiers such as *democracia*, *derechos*, *soberanía*, and *pueblo* hang from the rafters in the 2014 Vistalegre Assembly.)



(Figure 3: Party members prepare the stage for the Podemos's 2014 Asamblea Ciudadana.)



(Figure 4: A dynamic Íñigo Errejón moves within—and beyond—the frame while discussing a year in the life of Podemos.)



(Figure 5: An exhausted Pablo Iglesias addresses party membership.)

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¹ A.O. Scott situates León de Aranoa within a group of European filmmakers such as Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Laurent Cantet who examine ‘the present condition of the continent’s working class’ with ‘pessimism and compassion’ alike (2003).

² While Sally Faulkner acknowledges the instability of the term ‘middlebrow’, she argues that it represents ‘an important category within popular cinema’, particularly given its efforts to attract a wide viewership (2016 6). Middlebrow cinema, as she contends, aims to address questions of social and/or political context, thus attracting ‘aspirational audiences’ or spectators willing to question the world around them (2016 6).

³ Núria Triana-Toribio has written on the privileging of *cine social* or *cine comprometido* from the late 1990s onward as what the so-called establishment prioritizes as ‘the most *legitimate* [form of] Spanish cinema’ (2003 155). She points out that various national and regional awards, as well as a range of public funding schemes, have rewarded films that ‘engage with Spanish “reality”’ (2003 156).

⁴ In line with Quintana’s thesis, Martín Paradelo Núñez alleges that León de Aranoa’s filmic projects are too focused on ‘la realidad empírica y que, por lo tanto, se reduce a adoptar soluciones formales tendentes al documental’ (2014).

⁵ Here I would include directors such as Icíar Bollaín, Achero Mañas, Gracia Querejeta, and Chus Gutiérrez.

⁶ The staging of the first citizens’ assembly at the Vistalegre Arena, both intra-filmically and extra-filmically, reflects the *making-of* that takes place in *Política*, as León de Aranoa and members of Podemos mount their own representations of the party’s evolution before our very eyes. (Figures 1-3).

⁷ See Jonathan Snyder’s ‘About Time: Sensing the Crisis in Nophoto’s *El último verano*’ (2014) and Sara Nadal-Melsió’s ‘Anachronism and the Militant Image: Temporal Disturbances of the Political Imagination’ (2017).

⁸ See ‘The Effect of the Late 2000s Financial Crisis on Suicides in Spain: An Interrupted Time-Series Analysis’ by James Lopez-Bernal, et al. and ‘Economic Crisis and Suicides in Spain: Socio-Demographic and Regional Variability’ by Isabel Ruiz-Pérez, et al.

⁹ Article 573 now outlines the following as evidence of terrorist activity: “Subvertir el orden constitucional, o suprimir o desestabilizar gravemente el funcionamiento de las instituciones políticas [...], alterar gravemente la paz pública y [...] provocar un estado de terror en la población o en una parte de ella” (www.congreso.es).

¹⁰ In his 2016 Christmas speech, Felipe insisted upon the importance of ‘una convivencia democrática basada en el respeto a la ley’ (24 December 2016). More recently, the King claimed that elected officials in Catalonia ‘han quebrantado los principios democráticos de todo estado de derecho’ (3 October 2017). In his Christmas speech from 2017, however, Felipe struck a more conciliatory tone, but insisted that the newly elected Catalan parliament—after the snap election on 21

December 2017—should follow ‘un camino que debe conducir a que renazca la confianza, el prestigio y la mejor imagen de Cataluña’ (24 December 2017).

¹¹ Querejeta, daughter of the film’s producer Elías Querejeta, collated Rodríguez and León de Aranoa’s footage, giving the film, in the latter’s words, ‘algo de improvisación’ (as quoted in Torreiro 2017, 181).

¹² As Ramiro notes, following Borrell’s resignation in 1999, the PSOE was left in shambles. ‘[S]urrounded by a climate of internal turmoil, the recently defeated General Secretary Almunia was nominated candidate to PM. After that, the PSOE suffered a crushing defeat in the 2000 elections’ (2016 128).

¹³ As Stuart Hall has asserted, the neoliberal revolution has produced ‘a massive depoliticization’ of the social order from the 1980s to the present, which some might misinterpret ‘as “disaffected consent”’ (2011 723).

¹⁴ The following list, while partial, is representative of documentary cinema produced in Spain since 2008: *Alcaldessa* (Pau Faus, 2016), *Metamorphosis* (Manuel Pérez Cáceres, 2016), *Informe general II: el nuevo rapto de Europa* (Pere Portabella, 2015), *15M: 'Excelente. Revulsivo. Importante'* (Stéphane M. Grueso, 2013), *Tomaremos las calles* (Javi Larrauri, 2013), *¿Por qué?! Una crisis endémica* (Marc Balaguer, 2013), *Libre te quiero* (Basilio Martín Patino, 2012), *La marcha indignada* (Alberto Reverón & Amira Bochenska, 2012), *Mis ahorros, su botín* (Borja Casal Martí, 2012), *Banderas falsas* (Carlos Serrano Azcona, 2011), *Mercado de futuros* (Mercedes Álvarez, 2011), and *€SPANISH DREAM* (Guillermo Cruz & Santiago Cirugeda, 2009).

¹⁵ Errejón emphasizes the longer history of public assembly in Spain, however, looking back to 1976, which he calls ‘el año de mayor auge de las huelgas, de las movilizaciones [y] de presión popular’ (2015 22). The ferocity of the street protests from 1976, in his analysis, guaranteed that ‘la dictadura no pudiera seguir sin hacer modificaciones’ (2015 22).

¹⁶ As Bill Nichols has written, observational documentarians tend to opt for productions that do not feature voice-over commentary, supplementary music, sound effects, historical re-enactments, or interviews with participants. The abandonment of control over the staging, he argues, ‘affirms a sense of commitment or engagement with the immediate, intimate, and personal as it occurs’ (2010 177).

¹⁷ Juanma del Álamo, in a contemptuous review of *Política*, argues that León de Aranoa’s film ‘es un espectacular lavado de imagen de Podemos’ that, ultimately, fails to ‘ofrecer ningún matiz o voz discordante’ (2016).

¹⁸ Iván Reguera offers a more generous take, claiming that ‘este documental es absolutamente impensable en los partidos tradicionales. El nivel de accesibilidad, transparencia, honestidad y falta de puesta en escena que muestra que la gente de Podemos es algo muy de agradecer’ (‘Un documental’ 2016).

¹⁹ León de Aranoa explains his historical intentions thusly: ‘Pensamos que dejar testimonio de lo que pasara, fuera peor o mejor, para la gente que puede ver este trabajo dentro de 15, 20 años, es lo que queríamos hacer. Dejar testimonio de un momento interesante. Y quizás histórico’ (as quoted in ‘León de Aranoa: ‘Es una curiosidad histórica’ 2016).

²⁰ Featuring relatable, if demonstrably staged, photographs of Iglesias, Carolina Bescansa, Errejón, Pablo Echenique, and Pablo Bustinduy, the 26J prospectus framed the upcoming election as a historic opportunity to design ‘un nuevo horizonte de cambio y progreso para nuestro país’ (Bescansa, et al., 2016 1). Nevertheless, some may bristle at Podemos’s replication of an Ikea-style catalogue, particularly given

what *The Economist* has characterized as the ‘strange death’ of social democracy in Sweden over the last decade (2010).